

Message Text

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 360 - JULY 18, 1977

MOSCOW, KUWAIT, SANA FOR AMBASSADORS

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING

1. LEBANON. RENEWED CLASHES BETWEEN PRO-SYRIAN AND ANTI-SYRIAN PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS OCCURRED IN BEIRUT YESTERDAY. THE ANTI-SYRIAN GROUPS ATTACKED A PRO-SYRIAN SAIQA HEAD-QUARTERS IN WEST BEIRUT. FATAH MILITARY POLICE ARRANGED A CEASEFIRE AFTER SEVERAL HOURS OF FIGHTING; AS MANY AS FIFTY PERSONS WERE WOUNDED.

2. WE HAVE HAD REPORTS THAT THE PALESTINIANS ARE STILL PRESSING THEIR PLAN FOR A CEASEFIRE IN SOUTH LEBANON AND
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THAT THE SYRIANS ARE INITIATING A PLAN OF THEIR OWN. THE PALESTINIAN EFFORT TO ARRANGE A CEASEFIRE AND TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO WAS INITIATED BY FATAH NEARLY TWO WEEKS AGO. PLO MODERATE HANI AL-HASSAN HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH LEBANESE CHRISTIAN LEADERS, INCLUDING SARKIS, THE MARONITE PATRIARCH, AND THE LEBANESE FRONT, AS WELL AS MANY MUSLIMS. THE PLO APPEARS TO BE PUSHING FOR A CHRISTIAN-PALESTINIAN

INITIATIVE WHICH WOULD SUBSEQUENTLY BE SUPPORTED BY THE LEBANESE AND SYRIAN GOVERNMENTS.

3. EMBASSY DAMASCUS REPORTS THAT THE SYRIANS ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN THEIR OWN ATTEMPT TO BRING THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON UNDER CONTROL. SYRIAN LEADERS HAVE INITIATED INTENSIVE CONTACTS WITH LEBANESE LEADERS, INCLUDING JUMBLATT, KARAME AND BOUTROS, IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH A BASIS FOR A POLITICAL RECONCILIATION.

4. WE CAN SEE LITTLE HOPE THAT EITHER OF THESE INITIATIVES WILL SUCCEED. THE STAKE OF EACH PARTY IN THE STRUGGLE IN SOUTH LEBANON HAS INCREASED WITH TIME AS EACH HAS HAD TO GRADUALLY AUGMENT ITS COMMITMENT IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO. MOREOVER, AS THE CONTINUING CONFLICT HAS RECEIVED MORE MEDIA COVERAGE, IT WOULD LIKELY HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS IN SYRIA, ISRAEL, AND LEBANON IF ANY OF THESE PARTIES WERE TO BACK DOWN FROM THEIR PRESENT POSITIONS.

5. FOR THE SYRIANS, SOUTHERN LEBANON IS A CONTINUING EMBARRASSMENT. AS THE PROBLEM FESTERS, MAKING A POLITICAL RECONCILIATION DIFFICULT THROUGHOUT LEBANON, ASSAD'S ENTIRE LEBANON POLICY IS BROUGHT INTO QUESTION. IT IS VERY POSSIBLE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT BY ITS CURRENT MILITARY OVER EXTENSION IN LEBANON, SYRIA COULD NOT RESPOND TO
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AN ISRAELI MOVE AGAINST SOUTH LEBANON, JORDAN, OR SYRIA ITSELF.

6. IN ORDER TO INCREASE THEIR CONTROL IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, THE SYRIANS HAVE INFILTRATED SEVERAL BATTALIONS OF REGULAR SYRIAN TROOPS IN SAIQA UNIFORMS INTO THE BORDER AREA. THEY ARE NOW IN THE ARQOUB AND SOUTH OF THE LITANI. (THIS AREA IS FURTHER SOUTH THAN THAT INTO WHICH THE SYRIANS ADVANCED LAST JANUARY, WHEN THE ISRAELIS INSISTED THAT THE SYRIANS WITHDRAW.)

7. IN ORDER TO EXTRICATE THEMSELVES FROM THEIR CURRENT IMPASSE, THE SYRIANS NEED TO BE ABLE TO GAIN CONTROL OF THE PALESTINIANS AND RIGHTISTS, IN THE SOUTH. UNTIL THIS IS ACHIEVED, TENSION WILL REMAIN HIGH THROUGHOUT LEBANON. REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS WILL NOT ACQUIESCE IN SYRIAN DEMANDS, AND THE RIGHTISTS WILL MAINTAIN THEIR TIES WITH THE ISRAELIS AS A COUNTER TO SYRIAN INFLUENCE.

8. IN A SIMILAR FASHION, THE ISRAELIS HAVE BECOME MORE DEEPLY AND DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN SOUTHERN LEBANON. ISRAELI POLICY IS BASED ON THREE PRINCIPLES:

(A) THE SYRIAN ARMY CANNOT APPROACH THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE BORDER, FOR SUCH A MOVE WOULD ALTER THE BALANCE OF POWER AND AFFECT ISRAELI SECURITY.

(B) PALESTINIAN FORCES CANNOT BECOME STRONG ENOUGH TO DIRECTLY THREATEN ISRAEL. THEY CANNOT EVEN RETURN TO THE POSITION THEY HELD PRIOR TO THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR OR ISRAELI'S SECURITY WOULD BE THREATENED.

(C) THE CHRISTIANS AND OTHER RIGHTISTS MUST BE PROTECTED.

9. FOR THE PALESTINIANS, SOUTHERN LEBANON REMAINS THE SECRET

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ONE AREA WHERE THEY CAN MAINTAIN THEIR AUTONOMY. AS THE BUFFER BETWEEN THE TWO LARGE POWERS, THE PALESTINIANS HAVE GREATER FREEDOM THAN IF THEY WERE DOMINATED BY EITHER ONE. THEREFORE, IT IS IN THE PALESTINIAN INTEREST TO ARRANGE A SOLUTION WHICH WILL PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO AND PERPETUATE THE STATE OF ANARCHY.

10. FOR THE RIGHTISTS, THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH SERVES AS A CONSTANT REMINDER OF THEIR INABILITY TO CONTROL THEIR OWN COUNTRY. MANY OF THE RIGHTISTS IN THE SOUTH HOPE FOR DIRECT ISRAELI INTERVENTION IN ORDER TO REMOVE THE PALESTINIANS FROM THEIR AREA. EMBASSY BEIRUT OBSERVED THAT EVEN SOME OF THE SUNNI AND THE RIGHTIST PALESTINIANS WOULD NOT MIND ALL THAT MUCH IF THE ISRAELIS POLICED THE REJECTIONISTS.

11. THE INSOLUBLE CONFLICTS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON REMAIN A FESTERING SORE, ACCORDING TO EMBASSY BEIRUT. NONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE REJECTIONISTS, WANT TO PERPETUATE THE FIGHTING. NEVERTHELESS, EACH APPEARS TO FEAR A SOLUTION MORE THAN THE CURRENT SITUATION. THEREFORE, AS EACH PARTICIPANT COMMITS GREATER RESOURCES, THE POSSIBILITY OF A MORE SERIOUS CONFRONTATION INCREASES.

12. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY BEIRUT, IN RECENT WEEKS TRADITIONAL EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH POLITICAL LINKS BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN LEBANESE FRONT AND THE SUNNI ISLAMIC GROUPING HAVE TAKEN ON A NEW INTENSITY. THESE EFFORTS HAVE INVOLVED SHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL (WHO HAS CALLED FORMALLY FOR A NATIONAL DIALOGUE) ON THE CHRISTIAN SIDE AND SAEB SALAM AND TAKIEDDIN SOLH ON THE MOSLEM SIDE. THE CHRISTIANS, HOWEVER, ARE SAYING THAT NO REAL DIALOGUE IS SECRET

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POSSIBLE SO LONG AS THE QUESTION OF THE PALESTINIANS' STATUS IS UNRESOLVED. EMBASSY BEIRUT COMMENTS THAT IT IS UNLIKELY, BUT NOT INCONCEIVABLE, THAT SOME BASIC UNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN MOSLEMS, CHRISTIANS, AND PALESTINIANS WILL EMERGE, PERMITTING THE REVIVAL OF A MORE TRADITIONAL FORM OF LEBANESE POLITICAL LIFE.

13. THE EMBASSY HAS ALSO COMMENTED THAT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAS NO INTENTION OF TRYING TO CONFRONT THE COUNTRY'S VAST POLITICAL PROBLEMS THROUGH ANY KIND OF LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. RATHER, SARKIS HAS ASKED FOR AN ADDITIONAL SIX MONTHS OF EMERGENCY POWERS. PARLIAMENT, HOWEVER, HAS NOT YET GIVEN ITS AGREEMENT AND SHAMOUN IS REPORTEDLY INCLINED TO OPPOSE NEW EXTRAORDINARY POWERS UNLESS HE IS DIRECTLY PRESSURED BY SARKIS. (SECRET)

14. EGYPT. EMBASSY CAIRO OBSERVES THAT THE PUBLIC STRESS ON THE CORDIALITY OF US-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS, THE DISPASSIONATE TREATMENT OF ISRAEL, AND THE HIGHLIGHTING OF EGYPT'S ROLE AS THE GUARDIAN OF AFRICAN STABILITY INDICATE THAT CAIRO WANTS TO MAKE THE BEST POSSIBLE IMPRESSION ON THE US AS BEGIN'S VISIT STARTS. SADAT, ACCORDING TO THE EMBASSY, IS ALSO SIGNALLING THAT HE IS WORKING HARD TO ENSURE A CONSTRUCTIVE PALESTINIAN POSTURE. HE THEREBY HOPES TO STRENGTHEN WASHINGTON'S DETERMINATION TO PRESS FOR A SETTLEMENT, WHILE GIVING ISRAEL AS LITTLE AMMUNITION AS POSSIBLE IN THIS CRUCIAL PERIOD.

15. MEANWHILE, FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY HAS GIVEN OUR AMBASSADOR A MEMORANDUM NOTING ISRAELI PRESS REPORTS THAT NEW ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS ARE PLANNED FOR THE RAFAH APPROACHES. FAHMY STATED THAT SADAT IS DEEPLY CONCERNED BY THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE SINAI; SHOULD THE NUMBER BE EXPANDED, IT WILL ONLY ADD NEW OBSTACLES TO AN ALREADY DIFFICULT PEACE PROCESS.

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16. RECENT SUCCESSES OF THE LIBYAN-BACKED REBELS IN NORTHERN CHAD HAVE FURTHER STRAINED THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA. CAIRO'S CONCERN OVER LIBYAN INVOLVEMENT IN CHAD IS ROOTED IN THE FEAR THAT REBEL SUCCESS WOULD ALLOW THE SOVIET UNION TO GAIN A FOOTHOLD IN THE REGION FROM WHICH IT COULD MOVE TO UNDERMINE THE

SUDAN AND ULTIMATELY EGYPT.

17. ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT, A JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED FOLLOWING TALKS BETWEEN THE EGYPTIAN AND LIBYAN FOREIGN MINISTERS INDICATES THAT A TENTATIVE AGREEMENT HAS BEEN INITIALED BASED ON RESPECT FOR EQUALITY, SOVEREIGNTY, TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, AND NONINTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS, AS WELL AS PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES WITHOUT RECOURSE TO FORCE, AND PROHIBITION OF ALL ACTS CAPABLE OF HURTING BROTHERLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO

COUNTRIES. DESPITE THESE PLATITUDES, RECIPROCAL, INGRAINED DISTRUST BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA, CONTINUED TENSION ALONG THEIR COMMON BORDER, AND THE CAIRO-PERCEIVED LIBYAN THREAT IN CHAD, WOULD MAKE SUCH AN AGREEMENT EXTREMELY SHORTLIVED. (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE) VANCE

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